

Hurricane Preparedness

Hurricanes are powerful storms that form at sea with wind speeds of 74 mph or greater. Hurricanes are tracked by satellites from the moment they begin to form, so there is usually a warning 3–4 days before a storm strikes. A hurricane may cover a circular area between 200 and 480 miles in diameter. In the storm, strong winds and rain surround a central, calm “eye,” which is about 15 miles across. Winds in a hurricane can sometimes reach 200 mph. However, the greatest damage to life and property is not from the wind, but from tidal surges and flash flooding.

Because of the destructive power of a hurricane, you should never ignore an evacuation order. Evacuating the area may be necessary because of the strength of a particular storm. By taking some basic precautions, you will be prepared and able to help prevent many injuries, as well as the possibility of some diseases.

Hurricane readiness should begin long before the event occurs. If you live in a hurricane-prone area, you can prepare far in advance for the possible dangers to health resulting from a hurricane by learning about your community’s emergency plans, warning signals, evacuation routes, and locations of emergency shelters. You should also prepare for a weather emergency by taking the following actions:

- Identify potential home hazards that could develop during a hurricane, such as those involving gas, electricity, chemicals, and structural damage
- Instruct family members about how to shut off the gas, water, and electric mains
- Establish an assembly point where the family meets in the event of fire or if a disaster occurs when the family is not together at home
- Give your relatives and friends the name of a contact person who will know where you are and how you are doing
- Know the location of your important papers, such as insurance policies, wills, licenses, stocks, etc.
- Post emergency phone numbers at every phone
- Inform local authorities about any special needs, i.e., elderly or bedridden people, or anyone with a disability
- Properly dispose of all chemicals, pesticides, and solvents not being used.

You should stock your home with supplies that may be needed during the emergency period. These supplies should include:

- Several clean containers for water, large enough for a 3–5 day supply of water (about 5 gallons for each person)
- A 3–5 day supply of non-perishable food
- A first aid kit and manual
- A battery-powered radio, flashlights, and extra batteries
- Sleeping bags or extra blankets

- A large supply of non-breakable spoons, forks, knives, cups, plates, etc.
- Water-purifying supplies, such as chlorine or iodine tablets or unscented, ordinary household chlorine bleach
- Prescription medicines and special medical needs
- Baby food and/or prepared formula, diapers, and other baby supplies
- Disposable cleaning cloths, such as “baby wipes” for the whole family to use in case bathing facilities are not available
- A portable toilet, and toilet paper
- Personal hygiene supplies, such as soap, toothpaste, sanitary napkins, etc.
- Alternate heat and cooking sources, such as a kerosene heater and a camp stove—use these only in well-ventilated areas
- Shovels and hand tools
- Candles and matches
- A mop, bucket, and towels
- One or more rolls of plastic sheeting, a staple gun with staples, and duct tape
- Plastic trash bags and ties
- An emergency kit for your car with food, flares, booster cables, maps, tools, a first aid kit, fire extinguisher, sleeping bags, etc.
- A citizens band radio or a cellular phone, if possible
- Games and favorite toys, etc.
- Extra cash
- Pet food
- Insect repellent
- Rubber boots/rubber gloves.

When a hurricane watch is issued, you should:

- **BE PREPARED TO EVACUATE**
- Fill your automobile’s gas tank
- If no vehicle is available, make arrangements with friends or family for transportation
- Fill your clean water containers
- Review your emergency plans and supplies, checking to see if any items are missing
- Tune in the radio or television for weather updates
- Listen for disaster sirens and warning signals
- If you must evacuate your home, pack only essential items such as clothing, bedding, food, water, medicines, infant needs, vital family papers, and extra cash
- Outside, secure any items which may damage property in a storm, such as bicycles, grills, propane tanks, etc.
- Cover windows and doors with plywood or boards if possible. Otherwise, place large strips of masking tape or adhesive tape on the windows to reduce the risk of breakage and flying glass
- Put livestock and family pets in a safe area if possible. Due to food and sanitation requirements, emergency shelters cannot accept animals

- Place vehicles under cover, if at all possible
- Fill sinks and bathtubs with water as an extra supply for washing
- Adjust the thermostat on refrigerators and freezers to the coolest possible temperature.

Expect the need to evacuate and prepare for it. Authorities will be most likely to direct you to leave if you are in a low-lying area, or within the greatest potential path of the storm. The National Weather Service will issue a hurricane warning when hurricane conditions are expected in a specified coastal area in 24 hours or less. If a hurricane warning is issued for your area or you are directed by authorities to evacuate the area:

- Take only essential items with you
- Leave pets indoors in a safe, covered area with ample food and water
- If you have time, turn off the gas, electricity, and water
- Disconnect appliances to reduce the likelihood of electrical shock when power is restored
- Make sure your automobile's emergency kit is ready
- Follow the designated evacuation routes—others may be blocked—and expect heavy traffic
- Listen to the radio for emergency updates.

To get through the storm in the safest possible manner:

- Monitor the radio or television for weather conditions, if possible
- Stay indoors until the authorities declare the storm is over
- Do not go outside, even if the weather appears to have calmed—the calm “eye” of the storm can pass quickly, leaving you outside when strong winds resume
- Expect the loss of electricity, gas, and water
- Stay away from all windows and exterior doors, seeking shelter in a bathroom or basement. Bathtubs can provide some shelter if you cove yourself with plywood or other materials
- Prepare to evacuate to a shelter or to a neighbor's home if your home is damaged, or if you are instructed to do so by emergency personnel
- If you should lose electrical power, eat perishable food first.